

VZCZCXYZ0021
RR RUEHWEB

DE RUEHMO #1951/01 1901407
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
R 081407Z JUL 08
FM AMEMBASSY MOSCOW
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 8940
INFO RUCNCIS/CIS COLLECTIVE
RUEHDX/MOSCOW POLITICAL COLLECTIVE

C O N F I D E N T I A L MOSCOW 001951

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 07/08/2018
TAGS: [PREL](#) [EIND](#) [ETRD](#) [MD](#) [PBTS](#) [PGOV](#) [RS](#) [SNAR](#) [UP](#) [BO](#)
WTRO
SUBJECT: THE FOREIGN AFFAIRS OF RUSSIA'S REGIONS: VIEW
FROM THE UKRAINIAN BORDER

Classified By: Acting Pol M/C Bob Patterson. Reasons 1.4 (b, d).

11. (C) Summary: Regional governments in Belgorod and Kursk work closely with their Ukrainian and Belarusian counterparts, and are minimally affected by any disputes their national governments may have. Local officials meet to discuss ways to promote cross-border trade, cultural exchanges, and work on common problems. Even when commenting on national politics, officials in Belgorod and Kursk frame their arguments in a local context. Trade with Ukraine, Belarus, and to a lesser extent Moldova, is growing, with local business organizations working to help Belgorod and Kursk companies do business with foreign companies. Strengthening cultural ties is also a priority, and exchange programs of various sorts are promoted. End Summary.

Local Politics Not Affected By Moscow-Kiev Relations

12. (C) The Belgorod and Kursk regions of Russia border on Ukraine and lie less than 100 kilometers from Belarus. Officials of the regions told us that, despite disagreements at the national level, they enjoy excellent relations and close cooperation with local government officials in Ukraine and Belarus. In fact, Belgorod and Kursk officials often meet with their Ukrainian and Belarusian counterparts to discuss ways to foster cross-border trade, fight narcotics trafficking, and promote cultural exchanges. The Ukrainian region of Kharkiv, which borders Belgorod, is especially active in working with Belgorod and Kursk. Such cooperation comes naturally to the many officials who have relatives in Ukraine and Belarus, and is simplified by the lack of a visa regime in the three areas.

13. (C) Even national issues are grounded in local concerns. Sergey Loza, Belgorod regional Duma Deputy from the Liberal Democratic Party of Russia, expressed his strong desire not to see Ukraine join NATO, due to his fear that visas would then be required to travel and Russians would lose close contact with relatives across the border. Editor-in-Chief of View, Information, and Partnership Magazine Mikhail Izatov lamented the breakup of the Soviet Union because it deprived the Kursk region of easy access to markets in Ukraine, Belarus, and Moldova. Despite a common language, he said, manufacturers and traders now have to deal with the hassle of customs regulations and different national laws.

Economic Cooperation Is Paramount

14. (C) According to Belgorod First Deputy Governor Oleg Polukhin, cross border trade is growing, but he complained that his region has a small trade deficit with Ukraine. Representative of the Kursk Committee of State Service and Personnel Viktor Kurkin told us his region had signed more

than 100 economic cooperation agreements with Ukraine, Belarus, and Moldova. He said Kursk has distributors of everything from Belarus-brand tractors to Moldovan wine. Kursk City Assembly Deputy and General Director of the Elektroapparat Corporation Andrey Kanunnikov told us he works hard to promote links with local governments in Ukraine and Belarus because this inevitably creates business links as well. He said his company sells many of its products to Ukraine, Belarus, and Moldova.

15. (C) Chair of the Belgorod Fund for Small Business Support Tatyana Sharova told us her organization and others like it, such as the Belarus-Ukraine-Russia Business Council, work to promote cross border business contacts. The Ukrainian region of Kharkiv, she said, is a very active partner and even has dispatched a representative to her organization. She said Ukrainian membership in the World Trade Organization (WTO) had not had any visible effects on cross-border business, and her organization offers classes for entrepreneurs on how to conform with new Ukrainian rules and regulations that are WTO-consistent.

16. (C) While in Kursk, PolOff attended a business exposition and agricultural fair in which companies from Russia, Germany, Ukraine, Belarus, and Moldova displayed goods, including cosmetics, clothes by fashion designers, china, and tires. The Kursk Governor signed 10 economic and business agreements, while local officials proudly announced the signing of several "major" business deals. Independent Kursk City Assembly Deputy Roman Gladkikh said he was pleasantly surprised to see an American at the event, and posited his city would greatly benefit from U.S. investment.

Cultural Connections

17. (C) In addition to business, there is a strong interest in both Kursk and Belgorod in cultural exchanges with Ukrainian and Belarusian regions. The Kursk business exposition and agricultural fair featured a cultural component, complete with folk dancers and music groups. Chair of the Assembly of Slavic Nations of Belarus, Russia, and Ukraine Viktor Ovchinnikov told us many organizations like his work to strengthen cross border cultural ties. He said he wants today's youth to learn about the history and culture that 400 million Slavs worldwide share, and so he organizes cultural exchanges, academic conferences, and artistic shows, all to educate youth about their Slavic roots. He invites students not only from the former Soviet Union, but from other Slavic countries such as Poland and Montenegro as well.
BEYRLE